

# Hospitality

## Imaginariums

**An Interview with Kathleen Taylor,  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts**



*Four Seasons Hotel Shanghai Pudong (above);  
a Premier Bedroom at the Four Seasons Hotel Baku, Azerbaijan (below)*

**EDITORS' NOTE** In 1989, Katie Taylor joined Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts as Corporate Counsel. She was appointed Vice President, General Counsel in 1992 and promoted to Executive Vice President, Corporate Planning and Development in 1997. She was appointed President, Worldwide Business Operations in 1999 and President and Chief Operating Officer in 2007. She assumed her current post in August of 2010. Prior to this, Taylor worked in Corporate Securities and Competition Law at Goodmans LLP. She has a law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School, a Master of Business Administration from Schulich School of Business, and a Bachelor's Degree in political science from University of Toronto. She is a director of the Royal Bank of Canada and Chair of its Human Resources Committee.



*Kathleen Taylor*

**COMPANY BRIEF** Canadian-based Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts ([www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com)) offers guests highly personalized 24-hour service combined with elegant, high-quality surroundings for those who appreciate the best. The company opened its first hotel in 1961 and has since grown to 83 hotels in 35 countries with an exceptional culture of service.

**How has the continued volatility in the global economy impacted the hospitality industry? How is Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts positioned for growth during these turbulent times?**

Four Seasons has operated luxury hotels for the past five decades. During this time, we've experienced many economic cycles, both prosperous and challenging. We've always focused our energy and efforts on those factors that we can control – namely the guest experience in our properties.

As our business has grown and our guests have evolved and changed, we've continually pushed the bar on innovative services and products to enhance the guest

experience. We are well-positioned for growth and success because we know what consumers want – recognition and customized service – and we can deliver on that better than anyone else.

**Are there key markets that offer opportunities for Four Seasons expansion? What are your plans to introduce new properties to the market?**

China is one of the biggest areas of opportunity for us. We've already opened three new properties there

this year – Guangzhou, Shanghai Pudong, and Beijing – with eight more projects underway, including Shenzhen, which we intend to open in 2013.

Last year marked a number of firsts for Four Seasons, including establishing a presence in Sub-Saharan Africa with the opening of Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti, Tanzania. In St. Petersburg, we've meticulously restored the celebrated Lion Palace, transforming it into our first Russian property. Four Seasons Hotel Lion Palace is set to open in 2013. Our property in Orlando is generating a lot of buzz as it will be the first luxury property located inside the gates of Walt Disney World, offering our guests extraordinary access.



There is so much excitement around South America right now and we're actively seeking several opportunities to grow our presence there. We're exploring prospects in Brazil, Chile, and Peru, as well as select opportunities in Central America, and we're focused on continued growth in Mexico, where we have two hotels.

Four Seasons already has a strong presence in the Middle East and we are in various stages of development in locations including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Casablanca, as well as a second property in Doha.

**Many hoteliers talk about the challenge of being successful in the restaurant/food and beverage part of the business, especially in major cities where competition from stand-alone restaurants is strong. How does Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts handle this part of the business? What is the approach to on-site restaurant offerings?**

Four Seasons has always aimed to operate some of the most sought after restaurants and bars in the world. We believe that every restaurant and bar at a Four Seasons hotel or resort must be relevant, fun, connected with the community, and serve great food.

Our approach is to focus on the local community as much as the hotel guest. All guests, no matter if they are staying with us for a night or simply a meal, want an authentic experience. Restaurants

must be relevant to their location while upholding Four Seasons' high standards of quality and service.

We're seeing unparalleled innovation and creativity in our kitchens and bars around the globe including at our newest openings like Proof in Scottsdale, CottoCrudo in Prague, Wit & Wisdom in Baltimore, and Café Boulud in Toronto. Whether it's sustainable menus, interactive dining concepts or design aesthetics that embrace local history and culture, we are focused on creating fabulous spaces where new ideas and approaches are being explored daily.

**Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts has placed a major emphasis on providing a world-class spa experience. How critical is this component to leading in the luxury segment today?**



Four Seasons was the first hotel company in North America to introduce a full-service spa – it has always been an important part of our business. Today, spas are no longer the exception, they are the rule, and we are elevating the spa experience for our guests. Each of our new hotels and resorts includes a spa with custom products and services reflecting local traditions and techniques.

At our resort in the Maldives, an entire island is dedicated to spa services and our new hotel in Toronto boasts a 28,000-square-foot spa – the largest urban spa in any Four Seasons property in the world. Just as each Four Seasons hotel is unique, our spas offer a true reflection of each destination.

**Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts is known for their service culture. Would you highlight the success you have had in providing consistent service standards?**

We are relentless in our pursuit of excellence – it is what separates us from the competition and why Four Seasons has always been and will continue to be the leader in luxury hospitality.

While each hotel is different and reflects the current locale and culture, there is a consistency in our service that our guests value. We invest significantly in the recruitment process to ensure that we hire the right people: those for whom hospitality is a genuine personal value and who truly care for our guests.

Our guests come back to Four Seasons because we focus on highly personal experiences – full customization, which is about knowing and understanding our guests and their preferences. We are in the business of exceeding expectations, which means regularly evaluating our programs and services to ensure that each guest interaction is living up to the experiences we're trying to create.

Our hotels are imaginariums where employees are encouraged to create new ideas and act on them. Some of our best ideas come from those working at our properties who witness the needs of our guests firsthand. We recently introduced a room service menu with dedicated items delivered in 15 minutes, which sprung from an idea at our Boston property to meet the needs of time-pressed travelers. This program is now being rolled out within our properties around the world.

**Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts is a brand that has been heavily focused on good corporate citizenship. How critical is this component to the culture of the brand?**

Four Seasons has always worked towards developing a long-lasting and positive influence on the communities where we operate and the people we employ and serve around the world.

This philosophy has been carried throughout our journey from a single motor hotel in Toronto to 90 properties in 36 countries, and it is expressed consistently by our employees through actions in our three areas of focus: supporting sustainability, building communities, and advancing cancer research, via our Terry Fox Run.

As we enter new regions and encounter new cultures, we are presented with new opportunities to give back and we continually



*Outside dining area at the Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti, Tanzania (above); Four Seasons Lion Palace, St. Petersburg (below)*



seek out opportunities to serve as a positive community partner around the world.

**How critical to your success are the relationships with your hotel owners? How do you ensure that these relationships remain effective?**

Our owners are partners in the truest sense of the word. They are critical to the success of our business and we often compare the relationship to a marriage. These are long-term commitments based on shared values and a common vision for success. We partner with owners who

are well capitalized, who share our values, and who believe in the culture of Four Seasons.

Like any marriage, the key to a successful partnership is constant and open communication. Technology will never replace the importance of face-to-face interaction, especially not in this industry.

Much of my time on the road is spent meeting and staying in touch with our owners and this commitment to high-touch service is more than just rhetoric; it is part of our DNA at Four Seasons – a core value that shapes the business decisions we make and in turn influences the type of men and women we attract as owners, employees, and guests.

**Is the industry doing an effective job of attracting women and providing opportunities for them to grow and lead?**

We're doing an effective job of attracting women, but we need to be doing much more to help them grow. Encouraging and developing women to excel within Four Seasons is something that's very important to me. Today, half of our corporate senior management team is female, but it's a different story operationally where we are working to ensure that a greater number of our top female talent become general managers.

Industry-wide, we need a dramatic attitude shift to break the perception that this is an exclusively male arena. There are many successful female general managers today and many companies like us are promoting from within. In a short time, we will see some of these women reach the top.

**What are your key priorities for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts in 2013?**

Four Seasons has always been and will continue to be the leader in luxury hospitality. Right now, we're focused on harnessing the company's culture of innovation enterprise-wide to ensure continued distance between Four Seasons and the competition as we continue to grow.

Last year, we rolled out a more refined and unified process around innovation, one that

encourages us not only to think differently but also to act differently. We know that execution is just as important as ideation. We're putting processes in place not to hinder creativity but to ensure that we share and replicate high-impact ideas across the organization.

We're serious about innovation and we know that keeping ahead of our guests is key; continually evolving our product and services requires a company-wide focus and commitment. ●